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ABSTRACT

The aims of this meeting of the group of experts set up to investigate the feasibility of a unit/credit system for modern language learning by adults were: (1) to define, on the basis of the results of three preliminary interrelated studies, the second phase of the research, namely, the operational specification of learning objectives; (2) to report on work in progress for the symposium to be held in 1973; and (3) to consider the further steps of the development and research program as previously outlined. Included in the report are a detailed listing of the conclusions reached at the meeting. (Author)

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COMMITTEE FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION
AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Meeting of experts
on
"A European unit/credit system
in the field of adult language learning"
Strasbourg, 11 - 12 September 1972

R E P O R T

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AIMS

The aims of this enlarged meeting (see list of participants in the Appendix) of the group of experts set up to investigate the feasibility of a unit/credit system for modern language learning by adults were:

- to define, on the basis of the results of three preliminary interrelated studies, the second phase of the research: operational specification of learning objectives;

- to report on work in progress for the symposium to be held in Austria in 1973;

- to consider the further steps of the development and research programme as outlined in Doc. CCC/EES (72) 60.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Group of experts reaffirmed that its task was to define principles which should, in general, be applicable for arranging language learning by adults on the basis of a large-scale multi-media units/credits system.

2. Participants examined three preliminary papers which attempt to clarify theoretical and methodological aspects of certain basic problems, namely

(i) "A model for the definition of adult language needs" by René Richterich. (This study proposes a catalogue of the elements needed to serve as reference points in the analysis of objective language needs. It also proposes a method for defining the content of the learning units and their pedagogic strategies. It is an open model, non-language - specific, applicable to the maximum number of individual cases).

(ii) "The linguistic and situational content of the common core in a unit/credit system" by D.A. Wilkins. (An attempt to define what grammatical knowledge of language is required by virtually all types of learner as a basis for the subsequent learning of situational units. The paper rejects the idea of attempting a synthesis of existing grammatical syllabuses or of creating a new syllabus along traditional lines. It proposes instead a notional approach whereby the question is asked: "What does the language learner want to communicate through language?").

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(iii)"Proposal for a definition of a threshold level in foreign language learning by adults" by J.A. van Ek. (The study proposes a definition, in operational terms, of a basic competence level (or threshold level) i.e. the lowest learning objective in the framework of a unit/credit system, in other words, the level below which further levels cannot be usefully distinguished. The threshold level is defined in terms of (a) linguistic content, (b) terminal behaviour of the successful learner).

2.1 The authors were congratulated on the originality and thoroughness of their reports. It was agreed that the three reports were compatible and together formed a sound basis for the further development of the unit/credit system.

3. Details on principles which have been laid down in the above reports will be brought together and extended with a view to preparing an operational specification of learning objectives.

3.1 This second phase of the research, to be carried out in 1973, will require full-time research assistance of a research worker for one year, or of two or more research workers for a shorter period. The duties involved will be:

- to conduct research in accordance with the directions of the group of experts established by the Council of Europe to investigate the feasibility and plan the introduction of a unit/credit system in the field of adult language learning, and in particular,

(a) to prepare a model for the operational specification of adult language learning objectives in terms of communication situations, analysed in accordance with the situational, notional and linguistic criteria developed in the following reports:

- "A model for the definition of adult language needs";

- "The linguistic and situational content of the common core in a unit/credit system";

- "Proposal for a definition of a threshold level in foreign language learning by adults".

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(b) to exemplify this model by detailed specification of the content of the threshold level of competence in English, and possibly also in another language, within a unit/credit system;

(c) to contribute to further elaboration of the unit/credit system (further levels).

3.2 Professor Trim will, in consultation with the other members of the group, propose shortly to the Secretariat the name of one or more research workers to whom a contract would be offered. The person(s) in question should have research experience in the field of applied linguistics, and experience in language teaching at the adult level.

4. Participants were informed of the preparatory work for the symposium which will be held in Austria in 1973 as a fact-gathering and opinion-sounding step for the development and research programme. The symposium should be the focus of a working programme, which is to provide - by correspondence - statistical data, where available, so that an edited collection can be made available to participants in advance. The deliberations of the symposium should then aim at establishing the actual framework for (a) future research and development, (b) a number of pilot schemes, and (c) administrative steps to introduce and recognise European units/credits in Modern Languages.
(cf. Doc. EES/Symposium 57, 1).

4.1 In order to facilitate the task of the National Rapporteurs it was proposed to postpone until 30 November the date of submission of the replies to the questionnaire which was sent out in August. (Doc. EES/Symposium 57, 2).

4.2 To supplement the information which will be provided by National Rapporteurs, participants in the meeting should endeavour to collect additional data on existing relevant enquiries; in particular, Professor Trim should, for this purpose, establish and/or keep close contact with institutes engaged in research and information agencies (e.g. Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research).

4.3 The experts were aware in particular of the considerable difficulties which existed for the gathering and retrieval of information from representative samples and on a realistic time-scale and budget about motivations and needs of adults learning a foreign language. The 1973 symposium should make specific recommendations as to how to obtain such information necessary to the further development of the unit/credit system, especially with regard to the definition of the content of specialised (situationally-orientated) units.

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4.4 It was noted that in the framework of the Eurocentres a first attempt to define the profiles of adults learning a foreign language and of their motivations and needs will be undertaken in order to determine the best ways and means of obtaining the information requested. Provisional results will be discussed at a forthcoming meeting in January with a view to exploiting this experience. Subsequently, related enquiries should, as far as possible, be undertaken by other types of institutes and organisations (e.g. "Centre universitaire de Coopération économique et sociale", Volkshochschulverband).

4.5 A consolidated report including

(i) the information provided by National Rapporteurs

(ii) the additional information mentioned under p. 4.2

(iii) and the results of the small-scale enquiries (cf. point 4.4)

will serve as a working document for the symposium.

5. In the opinion of the participants the phased plan of work contained in Doc. CCC/EES (72) 60 (pages 8-11) provides up to 1974, a realistic working basis. The steps envisaged from 1974 onwards are to be considered tentatively and should be adapted to developments whenever necessary.

5.1 According to the plan of work the next steps as from 1973 should be as follows:

June 1973	Presentation to the symposium of the concept of a unit/credit system which will by then have been prepared in outline by the group of experts.
1973 - 1974	In the light of the symposium results, revision of the provisional outline of the unit/credit system.
1974	Presentation of the revised unit/credit scheme to the Steering Group on Educational Technology, to discuss further elaboration, taking into account requirements of media taxonomy.
	Organisation of pilot experiments.

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5.2 This part of the work programme may be speeded up by taking into account the experimentation likely to be carried out elsewhere. In this connection, participants agreed that the group of experts should establish preliminary contacts with the German Volkshochschulverband (Prof. RAASCH, Chairman of the French Committee of the VHV) who might wish to take initiatives on the basis of the preliminary reports now available, with a view to developing a collaboration leading to possible pilot schemes.

5.3 The Secretariat should be kept informed of any experiments and developments in this field in member countries (1) so that it may in turn inform the group of experts and the full-time researcher, who could then establish most useful contacts.

6. It was decided to hold the next meeting of experts on 11 - 12 January 1973 in Strasbourg, to examine, among other things, the provisional results of the work mentioned under point 4.4 as well as to give further guidance and briefing for the full-time research. In view of the heavy agenda of the January meeting and the need to prepare it in order to spend time most economically, Dr. van Ek and Professor Wilkins were requested to meet beforehand in Strasbourg (10 January) together with Professor Trim, to put forward joint suggestions as to the way of combining the linguistic and situational approaches of their respective studies.

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(1) Mr. Salin Eert agreed to send to the Secretariat information on work in progress under the Swedish National Board of Education.

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